

# Employee Assistance Program Outcomes Similar for Counselor (Phone and In-person) and Legal/Finance Consultation Clients

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## Abstract

Outcomes of employee assistance program (EAP) clients were compared between three commonly used services: (1) telephone counselors, (2) in-person counselors and (3) legal/financial consultants. Tests of follow-up survey data (N = 3,200) from a national EAP provider (Optum) showed high levels of health and workplace outcomes for all three study groups.

## Statement of the Problem

Employees often have personal issues associated with mental health, substance abuse, family and daily life. In the past three decades, employers have responded to this need by offering professional counseling, problem assessment and referral services to help employees resolve personal problems affecting work performance. These services are called Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). Recent estimates indicate that 80% of workers in America now have EAP services available as a company sponsored benefit (Oher, 1999). Recent data has demonstrated generally high levels of self-reported outcomes for users of EAP counseling delivered over the telephone (Attridge, 2001).

This study replicates and extends past work by testing for differences in client outcomes between users of three common kinds of EAP services: (1) counselor via the telephone; (2) counselor in-person; and (3) consultations with a legal or financial specialist.

## Sample and Procedure

The study involves a national random sample of 3,200 clients who had voluntarily used a company or health plan sponsored employee assistance program in the year 2001.

The data for this study was part of a larger dataset from a major employee assistance service provider (Optum®). This company provides services to over 1,000 employers in the U.S. Masters-level counselors were available by phone 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. Telephone sessions included a problem assessment process and discussion of appropriate options for addressing the client's issues. Based on client request, about 15% of cases also meet with an in-person EAP counselor for 1 to 3 sessions. About 29% of phone counselor and 37% of in-person EAP counselor cases were referred into mental health benefits providers for additional care. Other clients had legal or financial concerns and had 1 to 3 consultations with specialists in these areas.

On a routine basis, about 10% of cases are randomly selected to participate in a survey. About a week after the clinical experience was concluded, a survey firm conducted structured telephone interviews of these clients.

## Results

Items on the survey asked clients about their experience with the service and how their personal and work lives were affected by the use of the service. Results showed that over 90% of clients followed the recommendations of the counselor/consultant, felt that the recommended care plan was effective and were satisfied with the services. The majority of clients also reported positive outcomes on clinical and workplace items. Specifically, most clients reported decreased stress and improved overall health and well-being. About 80% of cases were employed. Of these cases, about half reported improved work productivity and about one-third had avoided taking time off from work. All of these outcomes were positively inter-correlated.

Statistical tests between the three study groups found no significant differences on outcomes, other than avoided absenteeism was less common for users of the consultation services than for users of the two counselor services.

	Phone EAP	In-Person	Legal Finance
Sample (n)	1,387	1,274	539
Follow care plan recommendation	93%	95%	94%
Effective	93%	93%	91%
Satisfied	96%	97%	95%
Stress reduced	77%	79%	74%
health and well-being improved	72%	78%	67%
Employed (n)	1045	1031	436
Employee work absenteeism avoided	37%	40%	39%
Employee work productivity improved	55%	56%	36%

## Conclusions

This study of national data examined outcomes for the three major kinds of EAP services offered to employees in most companies.

- Most EAP clients have positive outcomes
- Phone and in-person counselor methods have similar results
- Legal and Financial consultation cases have outcomes similar or slightly lower to counselor EAP services
- The impact of legal and financial problems should be recognized by employers and help provided by EAPs